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SUBJECT: Media Reaction - Interview with Hamas leader by Swedish daily

¶I. On March 5, the conservative Stockholm morning daily "Svenska Dagbladet" published an exclusive interview with Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal by senior Middle East correspondent Bitte Hammargren headlined 'We are not against Jews, we are against the occupation':

Bitte Hammargren met with Khaled Mashaal in Damascus following the Gaza donor conference. In the interview Mashaal claims 'several European governments' are talking with Hamas behind closed doors. "But I don't want to name whom, so as not to embarrass them....

On the possibility of a Palestinian coalition government he said: "We are more than willing for this dialogue to be successful, as well as achieve agreements about other unsolved issues such as Palestinian elections, a transformation of the security forces and a reform of PLO. The problems with the shape of a Palestinian coalition government are that the rest of the world interferes....

On the issue of the people as he will not shake hands with women for religious reasons, he says "We within Hamas are not against Jews, we are against the occupation. We do not fight against Israel because they are Jews. As Palestinians and Muslims, we believe in all prophets. Our prophet Mohammed shook hands with Jews. I have shook hands with many Jewish journalists and prominent Jewish representatives when they have visited me....

On the United States he says he is upset Secretary of State Hillary Clinton did not protest the planning of 75,000 new settlements on the West Bank during her visit and asks why Clinton will not recognize the 2006 election result. "The United States and the world community should be ashamed about their double standards. Why do they place conditions on us but not on Israel? Now Israel is preparing to tear down an area in Jerusalem, Bustan, with 1,500 inhabitants. But the world is silent....

On the appointment of Special Envoy George Mitchell, Mashaal leaves the door open but states that: "Does anyone believe that Mitchell will be successful in the Middle East without talking to Hamas? Did he succeed as mediator in Northern Ireland without speaking with Sinn Fein and the IRA?"

Mashaal calls the Syrian approach of indirect peace talks the 'wrong method'. "You have to attack the reason for the conflict: the occupation. When the Palestinians hear that the occupation will end, the resistance will cease....

On what he means by 'accepting the borders of 1967' he says that "In 2006 all Palestinian movements, including Fatah and Hamas, signed a national reconciliation document. We agreed to create a Palestinian state in accordance with the borders of 1967, including Jerusalem and a liquidation of the settlements. But Israel is showing no willingness to cooperate. They only seek security for themselves. At the same time they only offer part of the West Bank land. They are not even willing to offer Palestinian sovereignty, only autonomy. That does not solve the problem....

SILVERMAN